

When a Little Help Delays Needing a Lot

Before we look at the nuts and bolts of securing good supportive assistance in the home, let's look further at the questions of when and why it might benefit. And generally speaking, the first steps are usually small, but can make all the difference in what comes later. Your children's opinions, those of your neighbors or the Wellness nurse have some value, and may be cheaply offered. But from our experience what is often in short supply and therefore more precious is that which needs first be applied - *an honest assessment of one's limitations.*

Let us put aside the expense, the inconvenience and possibly the grief incurred from accepting where life may find you now. *Begin with clarity about what is most important to you.* If the answer is preserving your privacy and full independence until you're forced to give it up, stop here and go back to the previous section until that time is undeniable. If it's to hold on to your money to pass onto the kids, re-read the previous section then go to the discussion of paying for skilled nursing care, as the more prudent financial choice may be to spend a little now to delay or avoid paying a lot later.

But perhaps the answer to what's most important now is time spent with family or friends or getting out in the garden? Maybe it's cooking personal favorites or completing the art or writing project. Depending on the answer it may be time to bring in help for some of the small things, some of the more taxing tasks or some of the day to day business that has become easier to skip, but without attention will accumulate as burden and put independent life at home more at risk. If you're not sure if you are handling all the little things well, we urge putting aside pride and asking for some outside opinions. But **if you know** that it takes you an hour and half to get to the breakfast table (as a resident recently reported,) that you've had more than one fall in the last 6 months or are struggling to keep track of re-ordering medicine or paying the cable bill, it is probably time to explore who might step in to lend a hand.

When professionals look at how someone is handling their life at home they consider how they complete the **Independent Activities of Daily Living:**

*Shopping, Cooking, Managing medications,
Doing housework, Doing laundry, Driving or using public transportation,
Managing finances* Using the phone and looking up numbers.*

Family or friends may be the first line of support, particularly when it comes to insuring that medications are being taken as directed. *And absolutely, support arranged to help with banking and bill paying must be fully trusted and secure. Many seniors have long since engaged someone to handle the vacuuming or other heavier bits of housework. If meal preparation is the challenge, there are lots of ways to get meals put up or arrange delivery, but if there is concern about on-going nourishment or hydration, that requires a committed set of eyes. Adequate completion of each of these essential **IADL** tasks is affected by endurance, balance, cognitive capacity and executive function. And of the course, the compounded effect of struggling with and perhaps scrimping on any of these tasks should not be under estimated.

All that said, getting help with daily tasks does come with costs, both monetary and personal. It is reasonable and common to stretch and try to delay as long as possible. People have different tolerances for risk, different levels of social support and off course different amounts of resources. But undeniably, lack of insight as to when support is needed is linked to what medical professionals call “worse outcomes.” The positive truth to remember is that by identifying the little things and allowing others to step in to provide support, more time can be spent doing more fulfilling activities and most importantly, staying safe at home.

[next in the series: Working with a home care agency]